



EBOOK

# The 8 Elements of a Successful Government Social Media Strategy



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What does a successful social media strategy include for public sector organizations? Hootsuite and Smarsh have collectively worked with national governments, leading digital cities, and innovative public sector agencies. In this guide, you'll learn the eight best practices that inform their social strategies.

Using real examples from innovative agencies and departments, you'll gain new ways to build successful strategy initiatives while meeting requirements to retain and produce social media records according to state and federal open records laws.

## About Hootsuite

[Hootsuite](#) is the world's most widely used platform for managing social media with 15 million customers. From local governments to national agencies, Hootsuite helps some of the world's most innovative public sector organizations efficiently serve and engage constituents on social media.

## About Smarsh

[Smarsh](#) is the leading social media archiving platform for the public sector. The Archiving Platform from Smarsh enables your organization to retain and produce all of your digital content—email, social media, text messages, mobile, websites, instant messaging and more—in one comprehensive archive, for compliance and eDiscovery purposes.



# #1: Map the entire customer journey

Research from the McKinsey Center for Government found that **social strategists often make the mistake of focusing on individual touch points—rather than thinking about the entire end-to-end journey of citizens.**

For example, a successful local government might map all the interactions a citizen might have as they attempt to start a local business, creating a clear and efficient online and offline process.

[Their survey of 17,000 citizens and interviews with state leaders](#) found that government organizations that skillfully manage the entire end-to-end journey of citizens (as they engage with different government services) achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction. These innovative organizations also develop more effective ways to “collaborate internally across functions and levels to deliver their services.”

How can governments map the customer journey in order to better understand where social media fits into the picture? First, create a spreadsheet and identify the 25 key moments when citizens need to interact with your government services, such as registering a new business, checking eligibility for a government program, or applying for a building permit. Launch online surveys around these tasks, asking citizens to rate their experience. You can also use focus groups with citizens to validate and enhance your survey data.

If you need to add more sophisticated data insights, solutions such as [Brandwatch](#) can use social data to analyze citizens’ perceptions of government services.

## Expert Tip:

SurveyMonkey integrates with Hootsuite. [Add the SurveyMonkey app](#) to your Hootsuite dashboard and quickly collect insights from citizens.

Once you’ve collected your data, prioritize areas for improvement. Host a brainstorm session to look for ways that social media could help improve the experience and efficiency of delivering these services. Use these challenges—such as improving how citizens find local health information online—as an opportunity to collaborate with other agencies and departments. This helps you uncover other departments trying to solve a similar issue.



## #2: Build a social governance system

We've found that once a department demonstrates success on social media, other departments become interested in setting up their own social accounts. But without a structured approach to social media, you'll have dozens of departments with their own Facebook Pages, public officials on Twitter, and local agencies running Instagram campaigns. This is social sprawl. It duplicates efforts, strains budgets, and prevents people from finding accurate information online.

To avoid social sprawl, set strict standards for approving new social media accounts or renewing existing ones. Departments shouldn't be allowed to create social media accounts without a strategic purpose.

Fairfax County (located in Virginia, USA) offers an excellent example of how to establish effective social governance. Their centralized team manages how social media is used to provide public services for 1.1 million county locals every day—from police, fire and rescue, animal shelter, public transportation, health department, and recreation centers to disposal facilities.

Fairfax County turned, in part, to Hootsuite to scale social media and empower their departments to collaborate strategically and securely. "We needed to shrink Fairfax County's 400 square miles into one centralized dashboard in which we're all collaborating toward the same mission," says [Greg Licamele, Director of External Communications at Fairfax County Government](#). "For security reasons and scalability, we need to be organized and see everything."



Fairfax County has a single “super administrator” in Hootsuite who keeps social accounts secure and efficient. This person creates all accounts and adds users to their Hootsuite organization with appropriate publishing access and team collaboration abilities.

This single point of approval ensures that people using social media accounts have the proper training, skills, and strategic purpose.

[As Licamele told Hootsuite](#), “People can’t just say they want an account. They have to apply, make a business case, then they’re approved, and then we do a test phase.”


This gives the super administrator centralized control, securing all social accounts. But it also allows teams to coordinate content, assign messages, and easily access metrics.

Organizations should also develop clear documentation, outlining the rules of social media interaction and business communication while noting that social media content will be retained to meet open records and FOIA obligations, as well as eDiscovery and litigation requirements. This documentation should be developed through collaboration across different departments in the organization, including the records management and legal team.



### Companion Resource

How secure is your social media presence? [Use this security checklist](#) to audit your social media presence. You’ll learn key steps to evaluate and reduce the risks of social channels.



## #3: Focus on culture and capabilities

“Strategy, when it works well, is executable,” says Paul Leinwand, co-author of the book [Strategy That Works](#). “You’re thinking about the capabilities. You’re being very clear about where you’re going to spend the money. You’re actually thinking about the culture to support it. You’re driving change in the right way. And you’re bringing these topics together every single day.”

One of the key hurdles in digital transformation is shifting your organization’s culture. Technology is only part of the story. Culture also needs to adapt to digital change. [Deloitte conducted a global survey](#) of 1,200 government officials in over 70 countries. They found that organizations successfully navigating digital transformation share one thing in common: they’ve built a holistic strategy.

“Strategy forms the bedrock of the transformation process,” explains Deloitte. “Agencies with a clear and coherent strategy are more digitally mature, better equipped to respond to opportunities and threats, and have a culture that fosters innovation and collaboration.”

As Deloitte notes, leaders need to train themselves on digital trends. “The presence or absence of a digitally savvy leadership plays a big role in whether the organization takes steps to upskill its workforce. Leaders who understand digital trends and technologies are almost three times more likely to provide organizational support to their workforce to help them build digital skills, compared to those who lack that understanding.”



## #4: Provide education for everyone

In the early days of social media, experts ran the accounts. Today, social is often only one part of someone's job. For example, a recruitment officer might use Instagram as a way to reach out to the community and attract promising new candidates for the organization.

According to Deloitte, [90 percent of government organizations report that workforce issues are one of the most challenging parts of digital transformation](#). Only a third of organizations report having sufficient skills to execute their digital strategies.

"The lack of digital workforce skills represents a major obstacle to transformation," found Deloitte. "The public sector needs to ramp up the digital skills of both employees who deliver digital transformation and those who lead it."

Training needs to be a core part of your strategy. You can create the most innovative digital strategy in the world—but if your people don't have the skills to execute it, innovation will trip on the front line.

**"The lack of digital workforce skills represents a major obstacle to transformation."**

*Deloitte*

How does this work practically? [In a recent Hootsuite webinar](#), Jeremiah Bentz, the Director of Digital Engagement at U.S. Marine Corps Recruiting, explained how education plays a critical role in the organization's national strategy.

"We don't see the return on investment from television and radio advertising like we have in the past because it's generic and insincere," says Bentz. "Our audience wants to communicate with a person. It's about facilitating trust and an honest exchange of information so that they feel comfortable talking with us ... allowing us to maintain a persistent presence online that aligns with our core values and mirrors one of the purposes of the Marine Corps which is to develop quality citizens."



The Marine Corps found that today's generation is more comfortable asking questions on Instagram or via Facebook direct messages than picking up the phone or visiting a recruiting office. Officers need to be empowered to represent the Marine Corps on a local level, connecting with recruits and building advocacy in communities. Bentz uses training and education to ensure officers have the tools and knowledge to succeed.

This local social media activity also connects back into their national strategy. As Bentz explained, the U.S. Marine Corps uses a full-funnel marketing strategy. They focus on telling the complete transformation—taking the average American and turning them into a warrior. Social media adds transparency to the process, revealing each step of this journey on Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat.

"We try to balance our national and local content," says Bentz. "I use the team-based structure in Hootsuite to facilitate the organization of content libraries ... for nationally branded generic content. And down at the local level, we focus on that storytelling content." "Awareness is important," says Kristy Dalton, CEO of Government Social Media and host of GovGirl.com. "But what we really love is operational efficiencies and cost-savings."





# #5: Make ROI concrete

“Awareness is important,” [says Kristy Dalton](#), CEO of Government Social Media and host of GovGirl.com. “But what we really love is operational efficiencies and cost-savings.”

“Many leaders face tough budget decisions,” says Mark N. Rybchuk, an account executive at Hootsuite who helps U.S. federal agencies build national social media initiatives. “These leaders need to balance the desire to innovate on digital with the everyday costs of running public programs. To gain support, digital projects need to have realistic strategies and clear business cases.”

There are three steps to help you solve this problem.

First, make sure you’re not measuring social media in isolation. Tag every piece of social media content with web tracking parameters for Google Analytics. This allows you to analyze the cost of reaching citizens via social versus other digital channels such as web properties, email lists, and paid media. [This guide](#) shows how to get started with UTM parameters.

Second, begin with the end in mind. Pick costly activities—such as call center calls or complex topics such as filing taxes—and use social to reduce inefficiencies. For example, the Federal Student Aid at the Department of Education found that the loan repayment process confused their customers. As reported in Accenture’s report [“Government for the People,”](#) the agency responded with a customer outreach campaign about loan repayments.

Their team answered common questions via several communication channels, including social media posts and direct emails to customers. The campaign resulted in more than 66 million media impressions. According to Accenture, this approach helps “reduce traffic to call centers because staff can answer many customer questions at once, rather than individually.”



Similarly, Russel Lolacher, Director of Web and Social Media at the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure in Canada, [revealed to Hootsuite how his team ensures social media](#) solves practical problems.

“If we’re receiving numerous questions about a topic, we understand the public may not be finding this information online so we look to our content strategy to address this. To tackle this, we aim to create content that comes from public inquiries, addresses public concerns, or corrects misinformation while focusing on customer service above all else.”

Finally, track two sets of metrics. First, track your program metrics—these are the metrics you need to excel at social media such as click-through-rates, Facebook video views, and engagement rates. These help you optimize social media. But these metrics don’t resonate with leaders. They need to be translated into foundational business measures such as cost-savings, channel efficiency, and brand impact. Create a second dashboard that only tracks operational efficiencies and cost-savings. This will be more meaningful to leadership and demonstrate that social media is an essential line in your budget.

If you’re still unsure about how to measure the ROI of social, [this guide takes you through each step.](#)





# #6: Find your focus with one content archetype

Strategy is about choices. And good strategists know they need to help leaders say no to certain things. Content, of course, is the fuel of any social and digital strategy. But with content creation, it's easy to get distracted and scattered. To get the most mileage of your content, you need to focus on one of five types of effective content.

According to [Altimeter's report "Building a Content Strategy"](#), there are five content archetypes organizations can create.

- **Content as Presence:** This is engaging content designed to increase awareness. For example, the famous *Dumb Ways to Die* campaign by Metro Trains in Australia was designed to promote rail safety. It generated over 150 million YouTube views and earned global attention. Most organizations default to this content archetype as it promises traffic and accolades.
- **Content as a Window:** This content builds trust and loyalty. The goal is to reveal your organization's culture, mission, and practices. It's effective for recruiting, increasing transparency, and demonstrating impact. Examples include recruitment videos on YouTube, sharing success stories (such as an environmental agency sharing a case study), or using Facebook Live to share town hall meetings.
- **Content as Currency:** This content aims to build the brand of the organization with high-quality expert content. It helps the audience become experts—for example, a work safety organization might use a new online training course to make sure construction workers see their organization as a trusted industry partner.
- **Content as Community:** Here, the organization builds content fit to a specific community of shared interests and peer knowledge. For example, your organization might focus on answering citizen questions on Quora or Instagram, using these watering holes as your primary distribution channel.
- **Content as Support:** With this archetype, your content helps citizens achieve tasks and easily access knowledge about essential services. For example, a text message that reminds citizens to put out their recycling or a Facebook group that helps business owners troubleshoot around tax time.



Resist the temptation to spread resources thinly across these archetypes. Pick one archetype and master it.

[As Omar Akhtar and Mat Zucker \(the authors of the report\) recommend](#), your organization needs to “think only of the customer and which one of these content archetypes is best equipped to serve their need. By choosing one, and only one content archetype, brands can minimize content waste, establish strong criteria for what they will and won’t publish, and truly create the most value for their customers.”



## The CIA’s content archetype

They’re the world’s most secretive agency. But on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, they’ve taken an unexpected approach: funny, useful, and often cheeky posts. From offering tips for reporting UFOs to sharing recruitment opportunities for college majors, the CIA is using social media to offer a human glimpse into the people protecting the USA.

The CIA uses the “content as a window” archetype. Their goal is to use content to give a sense of transparency into their work, mission, and history. By nature of their work, the CIA can’t be completely transparent. But on Twitter and Facebook, they showcase artifacts from declassified missions, [share interesting documents](#) about how their intelligence analysts solve complicated problems, admit to mistakes they’ve made in previous decades, and reveal sacrifices their staff have quietly made. The impact: connecting the American public to their agency’s purpose and role.

Second, the “content as a window” archetype serves as an excellent recruitment tool. From YouTube “day in a life” videos to glimpses of CIA offices on Twitter, they’re helping to generate interest and build relationships with college graduates and future analysts.



## #7: Gain confidence with archiving

If your agency's officials or employees use social media for communication, your organization must archive these communications and those of your department. This archiving must be done in accordance with state open records laws and Freedom of Information Act requirements, as well as e-discovery and legal obligations.

A comprehensive archiving solution gives your organization the tools it needs to use social media and confidently respond to citizens' records requests, or provide information for e-discovery and litigation processes.

Here are a few ways our customers use Smarsh to meet their social media recordkeeping obligations:

**Find conversations and information fast.** With a comprehensive archive that captures social media, government departments can run searches on their own and get the results back within seconds, without the need to get help from IT or their archiving vendor.

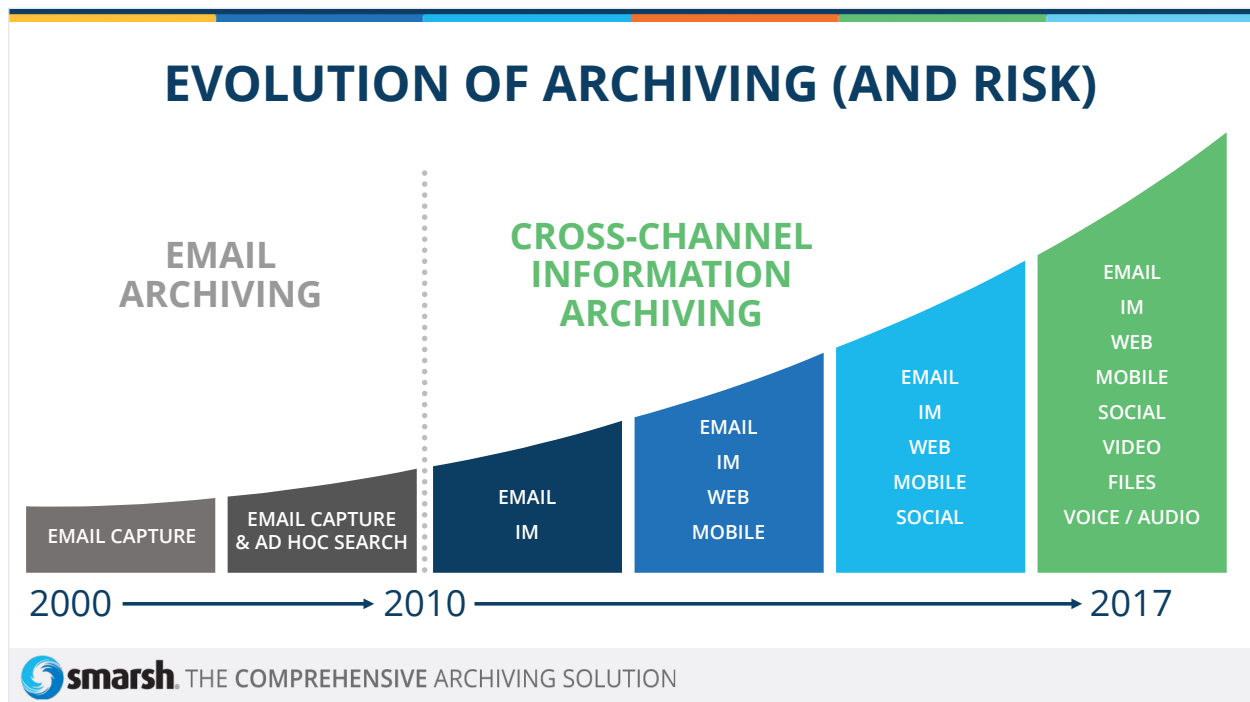
**Have everything in one place.** There's no need to have multiple archiving tools for different content types (one for email, one for social and so on). Using an archiving solution like Smarsh gives your organization a single place to store all electronic communications. That way, your records, compliance, or legal team can quickly search across people, keywords, and content types simultaneously to return universal search results, with no stone left unturned.

**Be granular when needed.** Searches are most effective when you can narrow them down. It's invaluable to be able to search through an archive by person, group, date range, keywords and more. Also, the Smarsh archive allows you to apply exclusions, add proximity search and a variety of other criteria to get to the exact information needed.



**Manage your recordkeeping policies.** Our customers use Smarsh to scan content from their department’s social media accounts for specific information. This helps the compliance or records management team become ultra-efficient and more diligent with social media supervision. Policies can be set up to help you filter out “white noise”—for example, the majority of social media content that doesn’t need to be reviewed after it has been posted. With fewer irrelevant messages to review, greater attention can be given to the truly risky messages in a reviewer’s daily queue.

**Save time with preset templates.** Smarsh has developed specific lexicons from a list of preset policy templates. These templates can help an organization quickly implement policies and address some of the most common supervision challenges, making it easy for your organization to identify real risk.





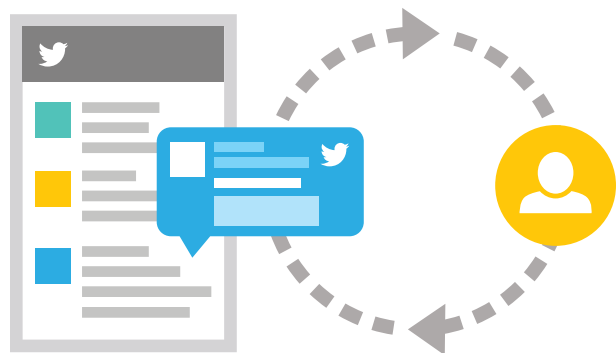
# # 8: Prepare for real time

A central part of any public sector digital strategy is laying the groundwork for emergency response. Here are a few solutions public sector customers of Hootsuite and Smarsh use to respond faster in real time and coordinate emergency response messaging on digital channels.

**Listen beyond “owned channels.”** Monitoring your organization’s Twitter account or Facebook Page only captures a fraction of conversations. Use a solution like [Hootsuite Insights](#) to proactively monitor for spikes in traffic around topics such as citizens reporting an emergency situation on Twitter.

Turn citizens into real-time “beacons.” Fairfax County (as they explained in a [Hootsuite webinar](#)) turns to citizens to act as “beacons” on the ground, capturing information about emergency events with live video. Because they’ve organized their entire county with Hootsuite’s platform, it’s easy to disseminate this information to the relevant department. Note: Make sure the live video apps that you use can be archived. We (Smarsh) created a simple guide to [Facebook Live archiving best practices here](#).

**Coordinate national and local messaging with Content Libraries.** Solutions such as [Hootsuite’s Content Library](#) allow administrators to create templated responses and assets (such as an official response to an event or a tutorial video that can explain a situation to people who ask on Facebook). This gives you a central repository of approved content that can be shared by support agents, frontline responders, and different departments.



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# How Hootsuite and Smarsh help your government organization

Hootsuite and Smarsh help government agencies manage their social media presence while meeting public sector records requirements. With our integrated solution, your organization can understand public perception, engage citizens on social media, and collect, analyze, search and take action on the results of social media.

- **Use one integrated platform** to manage users, implement enterprise-grade security, archive all social messages (including related content and metadata) and connect social with your existing tools.
- **Empower staff to engage directly with citizens**—without giving up control over messaging and account access.
- **Secure access and mitigate risks** by developing policies for using social media and gaining oversight into all activities across departments, regions, and agencies.
- **Stay compliant with FOIA** and other public records laws with social media archiving.
- **Keep communities informed with real-time social solutions** for public safety agencies, public utilities, and local first responders.
- **Post emergency alerts and instant updates** across multiple social media networks—quickly and securely.
- **Measure public sentiment around your programs** and policies with social media listening and analytics.

Contact [sales@hootsuite.com](mailto:sales@hootsuite.com) for more information on how to transform your government agency with social.